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ABSTRACT

This study identified the associations between maternal racial socialization practices and child developmental outcomes by examining the effect of poverty, maternal temperament, positive affect, and social support on socialization. The sample included 51 8- and 9-year-old African American girls of various socioeconomic levels from the Girls' Health and Development Project--a longitudinal investigation of girls; social, emotional, and physical development during middle childhood. Findings suggested that poorer mothers engaged in socialization practices less often than mothers with higher incomes. Mothers' temperament and social support were also highly predictive of mothers' engagement in racial socialization. Findings also reveal that maternal socialization is highly predictive of girls' developmental outcomes. Engaging in racial socialization may be a way African American mothers can promote healthy development in their children. (Contains two tables, three figures, and nine references.) (SLD)

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Racial Socialization and Girls' Adjustment: How Mothers Promote Healthy Development

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ABSTRACT

This study identified the associations between maternal racial socialization practices and child developmental outcomes by examining the effect of poverty, maternal temperament, positive affect, and social support on socialization. The sample included 51 eight- and nine-year-old African American girls of various socio-economic levels from the Girls' Health and Development Project -- a longitudinal investigation of girls' social, emotional, and physical development during middle childhood. Findings suggested that poorer mothers engaged in socialization practices less often than mothers with higher incomes. Mother's temperament and social support also were highly predictive of mothers' engagement in racial socialization. Findings also revealed that maternal socialization was highly predictive of girls' developmental outcomes. Thus, engaging in racial socialization may be a way African American mothers can promote healthy development in their children.

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INTRODUCTION

Although African Americans comprise approximately 12% of the total American population (Dryfoos, 1990), they occupy the lowest status position of any racial group (Fordham and Ogbu, 1986). Thus, how African American parents socialize their children for the realities of this society is very important in the development of their children (Marshall, 1995). Included in this socialization is the reality that African American children must and will develop a reaction to their social and economic opportunities (Garcia Coll et al., 1996). For young African American children, middle childhood is an important period because as they begin to function within a larger social world, they become more aware that their place in society is dictated by the racial group to which they belong. Thus, African American children need to be both emotionally and psychologically prepared to deal with the overt and covert hostility of the larger society. This situation has led past researchers to suggest that considering the link between maternal socialization practices and child developmental outcomes is the next step for investigators in this growing field of research.

PURPOSE

The present investigation sought to link maternal racial socialization practices with the experience of poverty; identify factors that predict which mothers were more likely to engage in these practices; and identify possible links of maternal racial socialization with childhood developmental outcomes in three areas: depression, anxiety, and temperament.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Does the experience of poverty influence maternal racial socialization practices?
- What maternal characteristics are predictive of mothers' socialization practices?
- Are maternal racial socialization practices associated with girls' adjustment?

METHODS

PARTICIPANTS: Fifty-one African American eight- and nine-year-old girls and their mothers were drawn from the Girls' Health and Development Project, a longitudinal investigation of social, emotional, and physical development during middle childhood. The sample was representative of various socio-economic levels. (See Table 1 for a description of the sample).

TABLE 1: DESCRIPTION OF SAMPLE

Characteristics of the Sample	Percentages/Means
Child Characteristics	
Age at Initial Home Visit	8.5 years old
Maternal and Familial Characteristics	
Age at Birth of Target Child	27.5 years old
Educational Attainment at Initial Home Visit	82% High School graduates or more
Income -to-Needs Ratio -- (Poor)	48% reside at or below the poverty line
Family Structure	69% Single, mother-headed households
Maternal Employment	60% employed overall; 75% employed full-time

N=51

MEASURES:

Girls and mothers completed structured questionnaires and were interviewed during the course of a home visit.

Poverty status was calculated from maternal reports of household size and family income and compared to national levels of the poverty threshold for 1996.

MATERNAL CHARACTERISTIC MEASURES:

- *Temperament*:

  Activity and Distress Level Subscales, Emotionality and Sociability Inventory (EASI; Buss & Plomin, 1984): A 20-item self report measure of mothers temperament, scored on a 5-point Likert scale.

- *Social Support & Affect*:

  Family and Friend Support, and Affect Subscales McArthur Foundation's Network on Successful Midlife (MIDMAC, 1995): Two sections of a midlife development survey designed to measure family and friend support, both eight -item subscales are scored on a four-point Likert scale; a six-item subscale of positive affect scored on a five point Likert scale.

- *Maternal Socialization*:

  Racial Socialization Scale (Hughes, 1995): a 19-item scale designed to assess parental socialization practices. Socialization practices were categorized into three scales:

  - *General knowledge*: Providing children with information about racial discrimination and historical background of African Americans;
  - *Attitudes*: Sharing personal feelings about race and race relations;
  - *Action*: Taking part in activities important to African American culture.

Mother reports were categorized into two groups based on the frequency of their socialization practices: *engaging* or *not engaging* in these behaviors.

CHILD OUTCOME MEASURES:

- *Depression*:

  Child Depression Inventory (CDI; Kovacs, 1985): A 26-item measure scored on a three-point scale, higher scores indicate higher levels of child depression.

- *Anxiety*:

  Anxiety Subscale, Hopkins Symptom Checklist (Rickels, Garcia, Lipman, Derogatis, & Fisher, 1976): A 7-item subscale of anxiety scored on a five-point Likert scale with higher score indicating higher levels of anxiety.

- *Temperament*:

  Sociability Subscale, Emotionality and Sociability Inventory (EASI; Buss & Plomin, 1984): A 20-item measure of mother's report of child temperament, scored on a 5-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating higher level levels of sociability.

RESULTS

Question 1: Does the experience of poverty influence maternal racial socialization practices? (See Table 2 for mean comparisons).

Results indicated that overall, mothers below the poverty level were less likely to engage in socialization practices than mothers at or above the poverty level ($\chi^2=10.26$, $p = .04$). Specifically, extremely poor mothers were less likely to engage their children in activities deemed to be relevant to African American culture ($\chi^2=3.87$, $p=.05$), and were less likely to provide their children with general information surrounding issues of race ($\chi^2=9.98$, $p = .04$).

TABLE 2: MEANS OF INCOME LEVEL AND SOCIALIZATION

SOCIALIZATION TYPE	LEVEL OF INCOME	
	HIGH	LOW
OVERALL*	1.21	1.09
GENERAL* KNOWLEDGE	1.59	1.27
ACTION+	1.62	1.27

* $p=.04$, + $p=.05$; N=51

Question 2: What maternal characteristics are influencing mothers' socialization practices? (See Figures 1 and 2 for mean comparisons)

Analysis of Covariance results with income as the covariate, indicated that mothers' temperament, positive affect, and social support were significantly predictive of mothers engagement in racial socialization. Mothers' temperament, as measured by her activity and distress levels, were associated with racial socialization practices such that more active mothers were more likely to engage in socialization practice, specifically, in the general knowledge ($F_{2,39}$=8.80; p=.01) and action categories ($F_{2,39}$=9.10; p=.01). More distressed mothers reported less engagement in socialization in the action category ($F_{2,39}$=7.09; p=.01).

Findings also suggested that mothers with positive affect were more likely to report engaging their children in more activities deemed to be important to African American culture ($F_{2,39}$=3.52; p=.07).

The analyses indicated that mothers' social support as measured by support from friends and family was associated with racial socialization practices. Mothers who reported more supportive relationships with friends and family were more likely to engage in racial socialization ($F_{2,39}$=3.76; p=.06, $F_{2,39}$=3.30; p=.08, respectively).

Question 3: Are maternal racial socialization practices associated with girls' adjustment? (See Figure 3 for mean comparisons)

Analysis of Covariance results, with income as the covariate, indicated that mothers' socialization was significantly predictive of girls' adjustment. Socialization practices were associated with child depression. Mothers who engaged more in racial socialization had children who reported lower levels of depression

($F_{2,37}$=4.28, p=.05). The analysis also indicated that racial socialization was predictive of childhood anxiety such that mothers who had high levels of socialization had children who reported low levels of anxiety ($F_{2,36}$=4.95, p=.03). Additionally, mother's racial socialization predicted children's sociability in that mothers who engaged more in racial socialization practices, in terms of providing general knowledge about race and racial issues, tended to report higher levels of sociability in their children ($F_{2,39}$=4.27, p=.05).

DISCUSSION

Findings suggest that racial socialization can serve as a buffer to developing negative child outcomes as well as enhancing positive ones. Regardless of poverty-level, mothers who engage in racial socialization have children who were better adjusted. Additionally, these findings suggest that the extent to which mothers engage in racial socialization is dependent on their temperament, affect and social support. The more supportive relationships and positive affect a mother has, and the lower her distress level is, the more she is likely to engage in racial socialization practices. Thus, the rearing of African American children becomes increasingly difficult compared to Euro-American children, in that African American parents must not only be concerned with general child rearing issues, but also must concentrate on and incorporate into their parental practices ways of raising emotionally and physically healthy children, despite living in a society where being African American is denigrated.

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PREDICTIVE FACTORS OF CHILD OUTCOMES

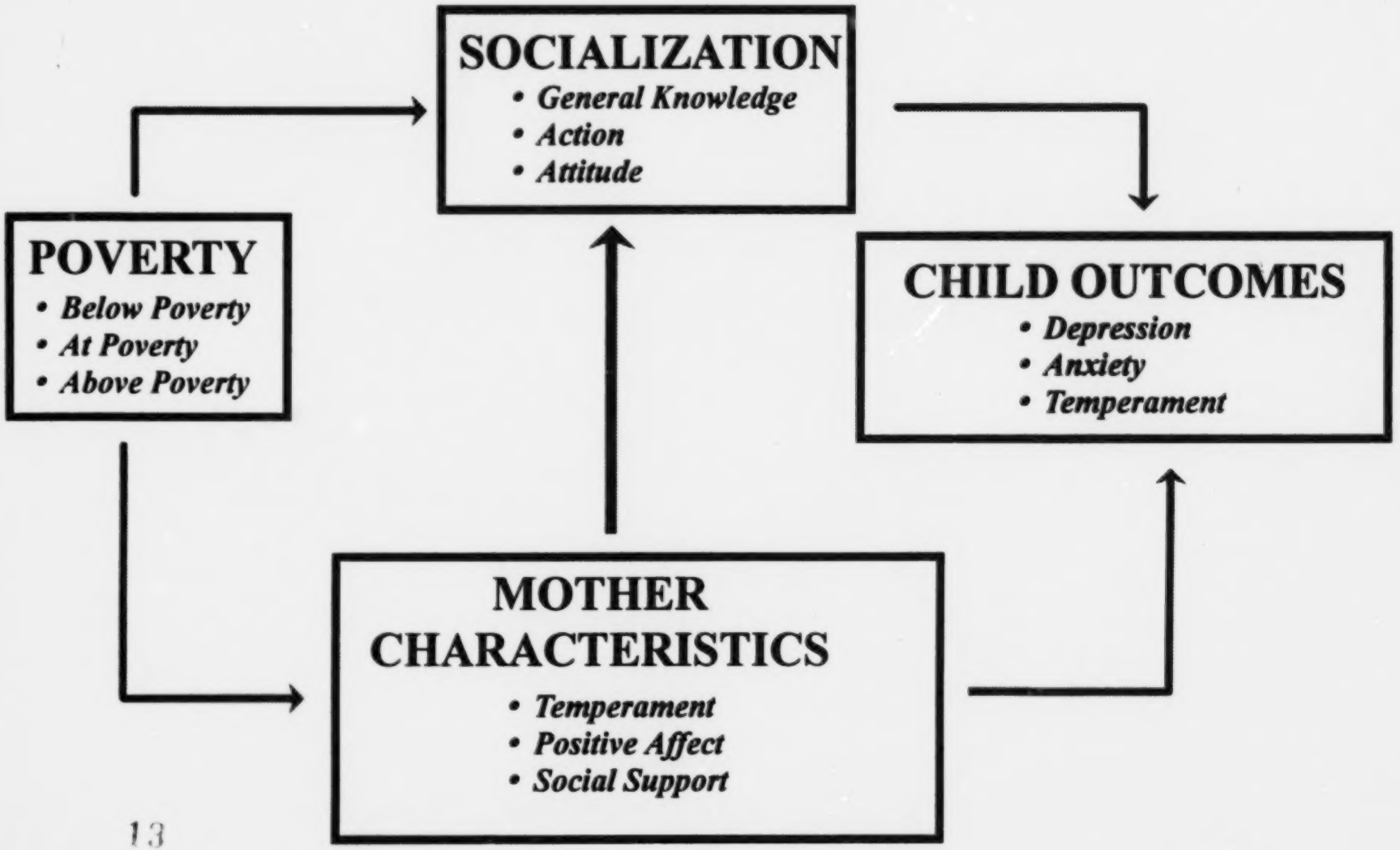
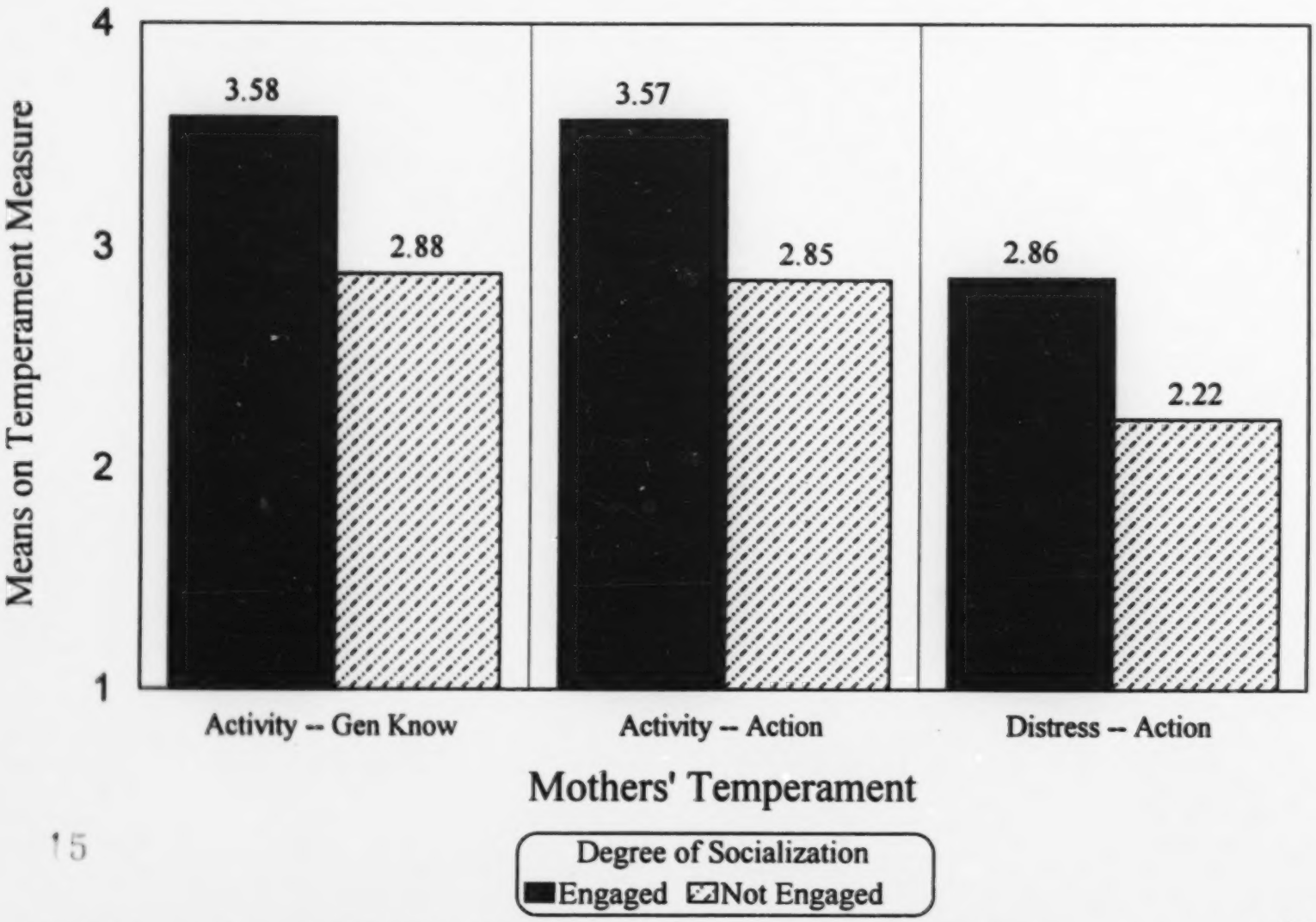
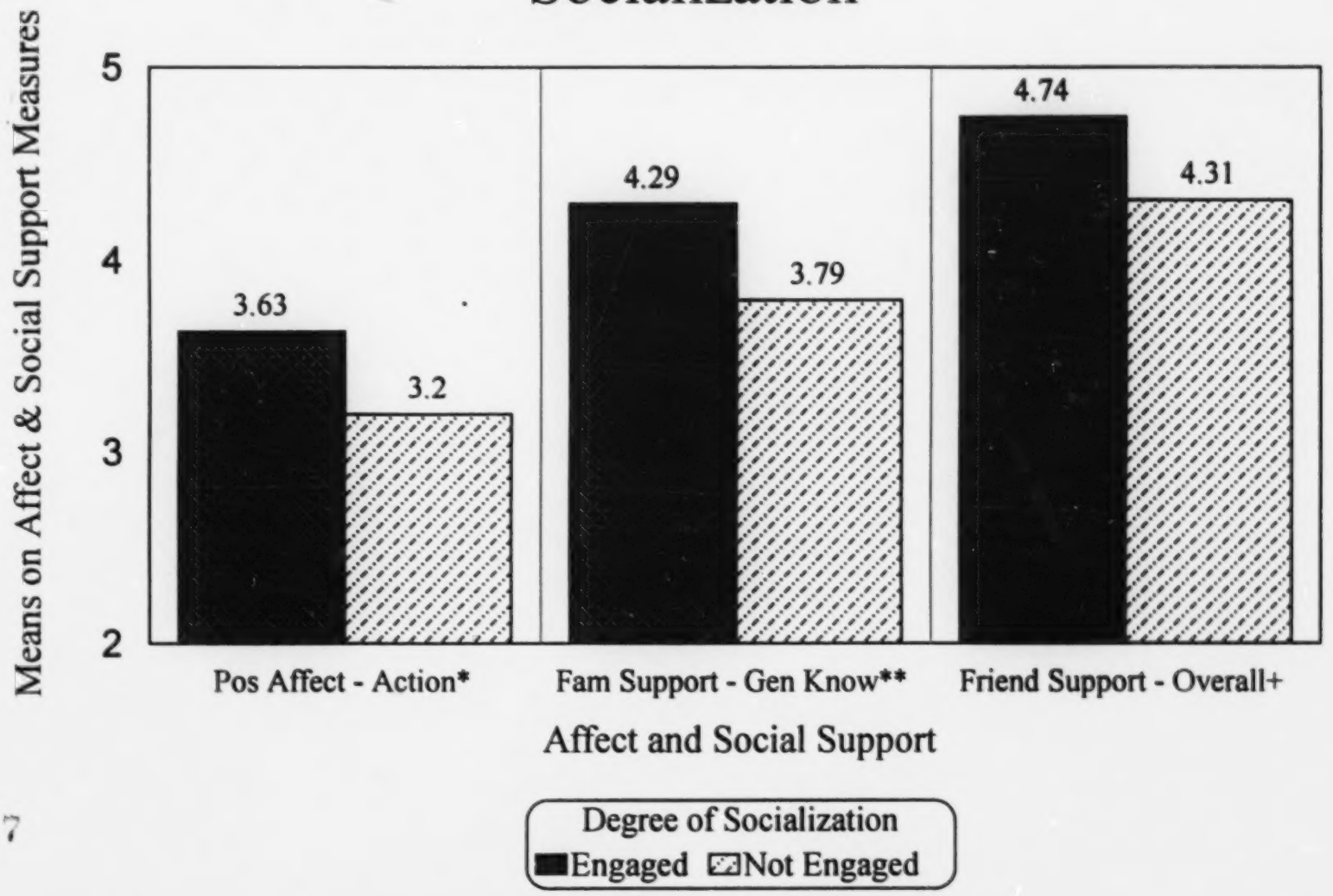


Figure 1: Mothers' Temperament and Socialization



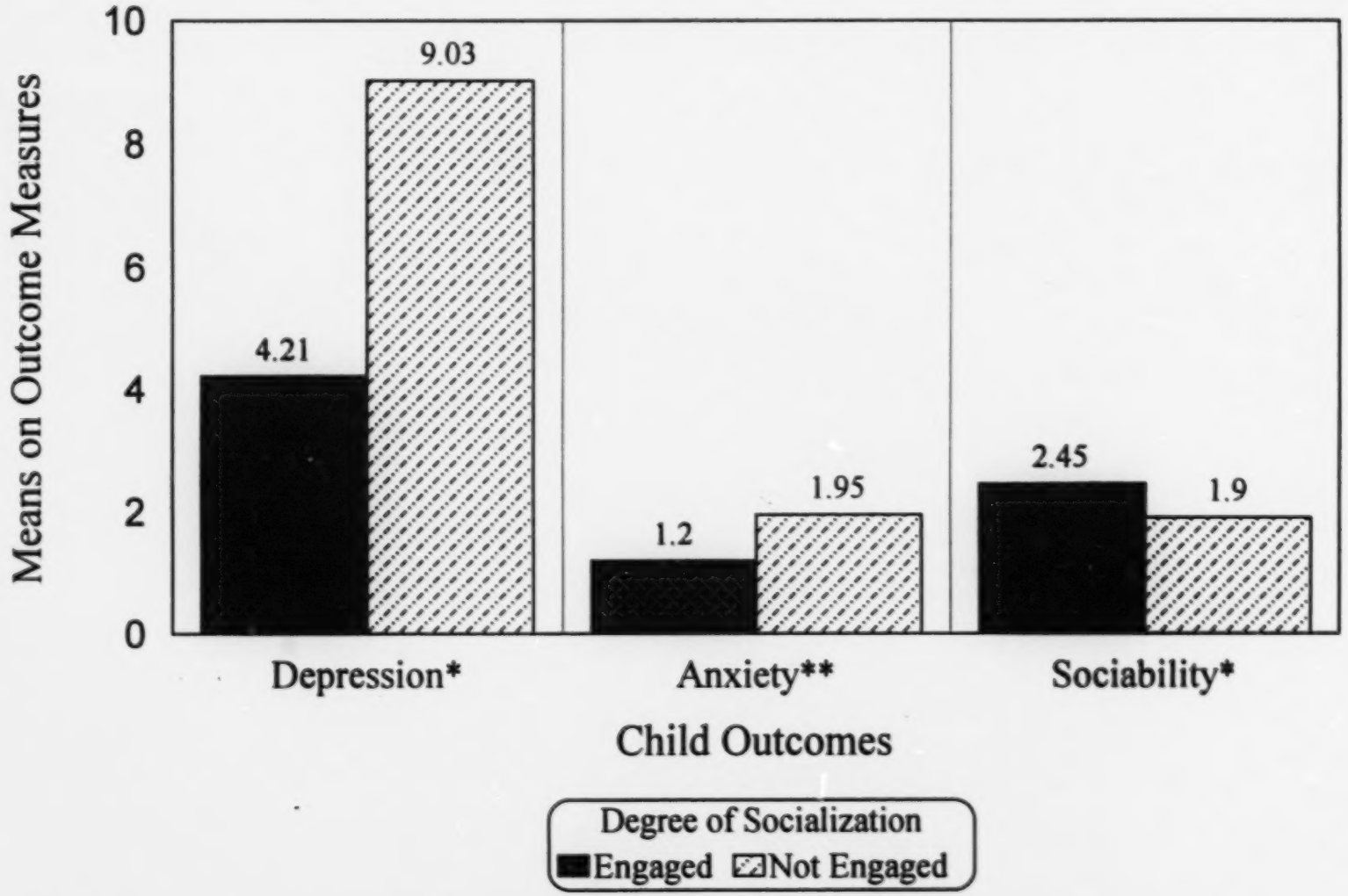
Note: Findings are the result of ANCOVA with income as the covariate and are reported in adjusted means. Findings are significant at the .01 level.

Figure 2: Mothers' Affect, Social Support and Socialization



Note: Findings are the result of ANCOVA with income as the covariate and are reported in adjusted means.
* p=.07, ** p=.08, + p=.06

Figure 3: Racial Socialization and Child Outcomes



Note: Findings are the result of ANCOVA with income as the covariate and are reported in adjusted means.
* p=.05, ** p=.03